
INTRODUCTION

The quality of life in a community cannot be measured by statistics. It can only be expressed in terms of the collective experiences enjoyed by the residents. It includes such things as a comfortable climate, recreational and entertainment opportunities, educational and cultural life, and an aesthetically pleasing living environment. York County is perhaps best defined by its quality of life. Mild temperatures, a low crime rate, hundreds of miles of coastline, and abundant flora and fauna contribute to the County's reputation as a pleasant place to live.

To preserve and enhance this high quality of life is the overriding purpose of the York County Comprehensive Plan, which is the long-range plan for the physical development of the County. Like all localities in Virginia, York County is required by State law to adopt a comprehensive plan, but the reasons for developing the plan go well beyond fulfilling this mandate. The Comprehensive Plan is necessary to ensure the efficient use of land in recognition of environmental constraints and the capacity of the public infrastructure. Its intent is to provide for an appropriate mix of residential, commercial, and industrial development; to guide such development to appropriate areas of the County based on the carrying capacity of the land, the existing development character, and the presence of infrastructure and public facilities; to preserve the County's natural resources and aesthetic quality; and to prevent the overburdening of the County's roads, utilities, facilities, and services.

Although mandated by State law, a comprehensive plan does not have the status of law. Rather, it is a policy document intended to provide direction for present and future policy makers in making the laws and setting the policies to guide the County's development. The Comprehensive Plan is implemented by the County's various development ordinances – particularly the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances – as well as the Capital Improvements Program.

Creating the Plan: Charting the Course to 2010

On December 5, 1991 the York County Board of Supervisors adopted Charting the Course to 2010: The County of York Comprehensive Plan, which was the first true *Comprehensive Plan* in the County's history. Land use plans for the County had been developed in 1956 and 1964 by Virginia's Division of Industrial Development and Planning, and in 1967 by Harland Bartholomew and Associates. Although never formally adopted by the Board of Supervisors, these plans served as a basis for the development of land use controls until the adoption of a Land Use Plan in 1976. Subsequently, a Schools Plan (1978), Major Thoroughfares Plan (1979), and Fire Protection Plan (1979) were developed and adopted as elements of the comprehensive plan. A new Land Use Plan was developed in 1982 and adopted in 1983. Unlike previous plans, the 1983 plan was developed not by an outside consultant but by the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, and County staff.

The 1991 plan is the product of over two years of work on the part of County planning staff, citizen volunteers, and elected and appointed officials. Public involvement was a key ingredient in the comprehensive plan process, beginning with the publication of a citizen questionnaire in the Summer 1989 issue of the Citizen News, which is mailed to every home and business in the County. Four Comprehensive Plan Review committees were established and given responsibility for developing the various plan elements. A fifth committee was also created to coordinate all of the elements into a single unified plan. Citizen volunteers served on each of these committees, which also included members of the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, School Board, Industrial Development Authority, and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. A staff liaison was assigned to each committee. Because of the County's special relationship to the water and the twenty-year horizon of the plan, "Charting the Course to 2010" was adopted as the plan's theme.

The committees went to work in February 1990, holding meetings, field trips, and work-sessions which eventually numbered over 200. All of these meetings were open to the public, with meeting dates publicized on York County's cable channel 36, and several citizens regularly attended and participated. Two series of town meetings were conducted, first in May 1990 to invite the citizens to give the committees some direction and second in May 1991 to present the draft recommendations to the citizens and get their reaction. The citizens' comments were then incorporated into the final plan where

appropriate. The plan, Charting the Course to 2010, was adopted in December 1991 and was recognized in 1993 by the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association with its “Distinguished Professional Planning Project” award.

Updating the Plan: Charting the Course to 2015

Following the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the County’s Zoning Ordinance underwent a thorough review by staff, the Planning Commission, an ad hoc Zoning Ordinance Citizens Advisory Committee, and the Board of Supervisors. The purpose of this effort was to revise the zoning regulations where necessary to implement the policies set forth in the plan, and the results were a new Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map, adopted in June 1995. In addition to the adoption of a new Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map, there have been a lot of other changes in the County since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 1991. Perhaps the most significant of these is a 30% increase in population (13,000 new residents), a 17% increase in school enrollment (1,700 new students) In addition, there have been many changes in County facilities, services, and programs, many of them directly resulting from the Comprehensive Plan. Some of the major changes are listed below in approximately chronological order:

- Initiation of a curbside trash collection and recycling program
- Opening of Chisman Creek Park
- Initiation of the Target 2000 program for sewer and water extension
- Closure of the landfill and establishment of the Solid Waste Management Center, including a solid waste transfer station and a regional composting facility, at the landfill site
- Establishment of the Senior Center of York
- Construction of the Grafton High/Middle School complex
- Closure of the York County Jail and, in concert with neighboring localities, construction of the Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail
- Construction of the York-Poquoson Courthouse
- Development of Kiln Creek Park
- Construction of the IDA-funded industrial shell building in York River Commerce Park

The Code of Virginia requires localities to review and if necessary update their comprehensive plans at least once every five years. Since the plan’s adoption in 1991, the Board of Supervisors has adopted amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to update the school enrollment and capacity figures as well as to incorporate the Regional Bikeways Plan, the Yorktown Master Plan, and the County Sidewalk Plan. Still there had been no comprehensive review of the entire plan, so in 1995 the Board began the review process by appointing the Forecast 2015 Committee, whose task was to develop housing, population, and school enrollment projections that would form the basis for the Comprehensive Plan update. The new projections were adopted by the Board of Supervisors on January 17, 1996. Then in March 1996, the Board appointed the sixteen-member Comprehensive Plan Review Committee consisting of ten citizen volunteers (two from each election district), two Planning Commissioners, and one representative each from the Board of Supervisors, School Board, Industrial Development Authority, and the York County Business Association. This committee was tasked with soliciting citizen comments regarding the Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives and recommending changes to the plan where necessary to incorporate any changes in circumstances or in the citizens’ goals for York County since 1991.¹

To determine how extensive a review would be necessary, the Committee undertook an extensive public input process designed to gather and measure public opinion regarding the Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives. This process included a statistically valid scientific survey of County residents (accurate within ± 3.7 percentage points), a questionnaire published in the Citizen News, two structured town meetings, and two unstructured town meetings. In addition, a 24-hour Comprehensive Plan Comment telephone line was established to enable citizens to leave taped messages with their comments. A variety of written, oral, structured, and unstructured methods were used to obtain as wide a range of input as possible from as many different sources as possible.

¹Resolution No. R96-65 (R), adopted by the York County Board of Supervisors March 20, 1996

Upon completion of this public input process, the Committee published its results in a report entitled Citizen Input, which was presented to the Board of Supervisors with the Committee's recommendation that, since the citizens' basic goals for the County had not changed in five years, the Comprehensive Plan undergo minor revisions rather than a major rewrite. The Board of Supervisors accepted this recommendation. (Readers who desire more detailed information about the Comprehensive Plan Review Citizen Input Process, which was recognized in 1997 by the National Association of Counties with an Achievement Award, are encouraged to read the Citizen Input report.)

The Committee then proceeded with a thorough review of the plan goals, objectives, and implementation strategies with the intent of incorporating, where necessary, changes that have occurred since the adoption of the plan in 1991. Goals and objectives that were no longer relevant or had been accomplished were deleted, while others were reworded for clarity, simplicity, or to reflect more closely the attitudes and opinions expressed by the citizens. In the meantime, the County's Planning Division, with assistance from other County staff, updated the plan narrative, again to reflect changes that have occurred since 1991. The plan was then reviewed by the Planning Commission, which held a public hearing and a series of work sessions before recommending adoption with certain modifications. The Board of Supervisors then thoroughly reviewed the plan and the Commission's recommendations, holding another public hearing and several work sessions before adopting the plan on October 6, 1999. Many of the revisions are minor changes in wording, and, for the most part, the Visions, Goals, and Strategies appear in this plan just as they were adopted by the Committee.

The updated Comprehensive Plan, like the original plan adopted in 1991, represents the combined efforts of York County's citizens, elected and appointed officials, and staff to analyze present conditions in the County, determine what the County's future needs will be, and devise strategies for meeting these needs. It is the community's vision for its future, specific enough to provide clear guidance to present and future policy makers yet broad and flexible enough to be adapted to account for changing circumstances.

Format of the Plan

Like the 1991 plan, the updated plan is divided into chapters or *elements* dealing with each of the seven subject areas addressed in the plan: community facilities, economic development, environment, housing, transportation, utilities, and land use. There is also an Introduction and a section entitled "Demographic Profile and Projections." The Land Use element is presented last since the designation of land uses incorporates information from all of the other elements. Several more significant changes to the format of the 1991 plan have also been made. Specifically, in updating the Comprehensive Plan, one of the goals of both the Comprehensive Plan Review Committee and the staff was to shorten the document to make it easier to use and understand. Therefore, much of the detailed technical information relating to existing conditions that appeared in the 1991 plan has been moved from the plan text to the appendices. Readers who desire more detailed information are encouraged to read the 1991 plan.

Each plan element consists of a brief Introduction, followed by a Summary of Existing Conditions, which is essentially an executive summary of the appendix for that element. This is followed by a section called Citizen Input and Planning Policies, which is an analysis of the County's present and future needs within the context of the results of the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Input Process. Each element then concludes with a series of recommendations divided into a Vision, Goals, and Strategies. The Vision statements are short, simple statements of how the County should look in the future based on the citizens' desires for their community. In order for this vision to be realized, there are a series of goals that must be accomplished. Each Goal is a statement of outcome that describes certain conditions to be met. Finally, for each goal there are specific actions, referred to as strategies, that should be undertaken. Although the nomenclature is somewhat different, the division of recommendations into a broad vision, general goals, and specific strategies mirrors fairly closely the 1991 plan's division of recommendations into overall goals, general objectives, and specific implementation strategies. The main difference is that each strategy is tied to a particular goal.